

Laws of the Sport of Bowls Crystal Mark Fourth Edition – Summary of Changes.

In 2021, World Bowls started a process to review the Laws of the Sport. Aside from a couple of minor amendments this was the first major review since 2014 during which the Third Edition was born. The new Fourth Edition was approved at a World Bowls Meeting just after the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. In the grand scheme of things there are not that many practical changes that affect the playing of the sport.

The Crystal Mark Fourth Edition is now the current Laws of the Sport for Lawn Bowls and can be downloaded from the World Bowls website along with a summary overview of the changes. Most Members National Authorities (MNAs) will adopt the Fourth Edition from 1st April.

The Laws allow for MNAs to make Domestic Regulations. Most of these have now been approved by World Bowls and will appear in the Law books.

When people think of new laws and regulations, they tend to think the game will change dramatically, but these changes will have minimal impact on the everyday bowling and officiating experience. While there has been almost 70 revisions made, the majority are cosmetic and format changes. Some of the key additions/changes are as follows.

There have been slight adjustments to some of the definitions, in particular the definitions of a Rink and Rink of Play. This change tidies up any confusion on what is included within the boundaries of the rink of play and now includes the end ditches and face of the banks. As a result some further laws have been adjusted to deal with the change of wording.

A new definition has been created from existing wording to define “measuring”

Another relocation of existing wording has created a new Law stating that in all games players must play with the appropriate number of bowls from the same set. Again this is a cosmetic change to define this in the Play Arrangement section rather than later on in the law book where it was harder to find.

A couple of changes have been introduced to allow Controlling Bodies to use their discretion when deciding when trial ends are necessary. In particular, in the event of a game being stopped due to inclement weather and moved from an outdoor green to an indoor green. Similarly, if moving a game from a grass to a synthetic surface or vice versa, trial ends may be permitted.

Throughout the Law book, there are many references to skips and decisions they must make especially when it comes to displacement scenarios. It was clear that there were some inconsistencies and no mention of singles players in these situations. So, for clarification, several changes have been made to include singles players.

In the Third Edition a new penalty was introduced to deal with players that delivered their bowls before their opponents bowl had come to rest. In essence it was identical to a breach

of Rink Possession. As such this scenario has now been incorporated into the Laws relating to Rink Possession. The penalty remains the same but it has tidied up a duplication in wording.

In respect of players playing their bowls out of turn, the laws have always dealt with the scenario where one bowl has been played out of turn but not two bowls. There is now a new law which states that if each team has played a bowl before it is discovered that one of them has played out of turn the end must continue in that order.

A logical approach has been taken when dealing with leaving the green and stopping a game. In the previous edition stopping the game was followed by leaving the green and substitutions. These two laws have now been switched as game stoppages are more likely to occur after a player leaves the green and a substitution may be necessary.

There has always been quite a discussion about how the score should be worked out when a player is missing from a side game. The assumption is that one quarter of the total score for the whole game is taken, regardless of whether a substitute is introduced. A wording change now clarifies that a fourth of the shots are deducted in each of the ends where a team is playing one player short.

Amongst the list of Marker duties, a new duty to ensure that the mat is on the centre line has been included. Whilst on the subject of Markers and Umpires, the Laws contain a list of equipment that may be used for measuring. As we all know there are many gadgets and items of measuring equipment used all over the World that may not appear on that list. Indeed there are now new technologies that are being used domestically such as lasers. A new Law now allows National bodies to approve types of measuring equipment for carrying out umpiring duties at a domestic level. From a World Bowls perspective the types of equipment generally classed as "First Choice" will be updated shortly.

There are a number of additional items listed in Appendix A which deals with Conditions of Play. Some competition rules can be lacking in detail and Appendix A gives guidance on what can be included in Conditions of Play. Guidance on the method for drawing rink numbers and opponents, dealing with players who leave the green on more than one occasion, arrangements for dealing with the scorecard and guidelines for playing in hot and cold weather conditions have all been added. It will be for governing bodies to introduce these into their competition rules should they be necessary.

And so to the change that is likely to be the most controversial and raise the most questions. There is a very clear intent in this change and whilst some will just enforce the law as written, we encourage all of you to understand the intent and application and the reasons for introducing this change. None of us like a cheat and cheats never prosper. It was with this in mind that a proposal was submitted to deal more robustly with those individuals that feel it necessary to cheat. To set the scene here are some scenarios to consider.

A team is holding 4 shots and the third in the team asks their skip to draw another on the backhand. The bowl is delivered but the third soon realises that it both narrow and heavy and heading straight for the jack. With no back bowls, hitting the jack would be disastrous and so the third steps out in front of the head and stops the skips bowl from disturbing the head.

Until now the only resolution for this would be for the opposing skip to declare the bowl dead. Hardly a punishment when that bowl was proving to be too damaging to the head anyway and is probably better off sitting on the bank.

How about the skip that moves one of their own short bowls out of the way to allow their thirds bowl to pass as it was on a good line and length. Again the only punishment was for the opponent to replace the bowl that was moved. So a tougher stance has been taken on these blatant acts of cheating with the introduction of two laws that will deal with the above scenarios. In both the penalty being forfeiture of the game.

There is clearly some clarification needed here as well. Questions are already being raised about the innocence of stopping one of your bowls from going into the ditch when it has missed the head and is a little heavy, everyone does it. Let's remember that other displacement laws still apply. There should be no reason or scenario where players have to touch, lift, stop or otherwise interfere with bowls from their own team or their opponents during the game. If they avoid this then they avoid any displacement penalty in the Laws.

The Laws Committee have pre-empted some of these queries and have published clarification on the intent of these new laws. This clarification is duplicated below.

World Bowls Laws Committee Clarification

December 2022 - Law 37.1 Deliberate Bowl Displacement

In response to questions being asked about the introduction of two new laws relating to the deliberate displacement by a player of their own bowl in its original course or bowl at rest, the LC would like to clarify the intent of these laws. The addition of these two new Laws was approved at the Biennial Council meeting of World Bowls held on 7th August 2022.

Laws Committee Clarification

In the Laws of the Sport Crystal Mark Third Edition, the penalty for displacing a bowl on its original course was for the opposing skip to declare the bowl dead, Law 37.1.1.1. Similarly, the action of lifting a bowl at rest to allow their own bowl to pass or prevent it from being disturbed was also dealt with by the opponent by simply replacing the bowl to its former position, Law 37.1.5.1. These counter-actions were arguably what the offending player was trying to achieve and were not considered to be a suitable penalty. There was no other law to cover these scenarios other than using Law 36 Deliberate non-sporting action, by the time this is applied it is too late.

In the Crystal Mark Fourth Edition, two new laws were approved and included within Law 37.1 Bowl Displacement by another player, to alleviate the situation of a player stopping one of their own team's bowls from disturbing the head and gaining an advantage either by lifting a bowl at rest or stopping their bowl in its original course. These are:

Law 37.1.3 If a player deliberately stops or displaces one of their own team's bowls in its original course; or

Law 37.1.5.3 if a player deliberately lifted a bowl at rest to allow their own bowl to continue on its original course.

The Laws Committee felt that the clear deliberate intent by a player to interfere with their own bowls in this way should warrant a more severe penalty which would be the forfeiture of the game. Both laws state that the "defaulting team will forfeit the game to their opponent". Where that team is part of a Side game, only that team will forfeit the game, not the entire side. We recommend that Controlling Bodies include details of how the scoring should be adjusted in their competition Conditions of Play.

The new laws were not introduced to 'punish' players that stop a bowl from entering the ditch that hasn't disturbed the head. The Laws Committee understands this occurs on a regular basis but it is a timely reminder and a key message from the Laws Committee that no bowl belonging to the players on the rink of play should be lifted, stopped or displaced. Other laws are available to deal with situations where bowls displace other bowls and the jack and these should still be applied accordingly.